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One Evening in Autumn

By Maurice Level
Illustrated by J. Simont

ONE single lamp with a thick shade lighted the drawing-room where nearly every night for twenty years Monsieur de Lambrét had played a rubber with Madame d'Arrens. Being very old they did not need a bright light in which to see each other, nor was much conversation necessary between them. One little remark, sometimes uttered by both at the same moment, would evoke a whole train of silent reminiscences; a piece of furniture on which their eyes fell at the same time would suggest an old story that both knew too well to repeat; and never did either ask: "What are you thinking about?"

The present holding very little active interest, their future being measured, their thoughts turned more often than not to the past.

MONSIEUR DE LAMBRÉT, who had been in the navy, would talk of his long-past adventures, of weeks lived between sky and sea, of countries where

the ardor of burning suns and the violence of winter storms had made him homesick for the temperate sunshine and chthonic snows of France. And his stories were filled with wonderful pagodas, gilded temples of rose-marble, furniture with rainbow lights in its pearl inlays, with strange gods of bronze or gold or ivory.

Curiously enough, he had brought nothing back from his many voyages; the house in which he settled after he left the sea was that in which he had been born and his parents had died, and it remained exactly as it always had been. He hung his stick on the peg on which he used to hang his hoop; his servant walked quietly on the carpet on which he had toddled about, hanging on to his mother's skirt.

It was the same with Madame d'Arrens. Nothing

had changed in the house. She sat with Old World grace in the chair that had been her favorite when she was a graceful young girl. Around her, around them both, life seemed to have stood still, and now it was filled with the sweetness of their calm and discreet friendship.

"The lovers are there!" the people of the town would say to each other, smiling, when they saw the light in the drawing-room window.

THE old people were both aware of this kindly gossip but they never discussed it. In spite of their close friendship, a curious kind of reserve kept them from opening their hearts to each other. It had often happened that when the clock struck eleven and the cards were put away, Monsieur de Lambrét had passed along the deserted street unsatisfied by the tender good-night smile and the curtsies of the kiss on the hand, and had been tempted to retrace his steps to say words he had never. *Continued on page 42.*

tor. It became clear to Dolf that Tom Wainwright had determined to marry Sheila, thus making himself impregnable socially as he was already financially. Sheila merely toyed with him for lack of something better to do; in the meantime his car was inoperable, and his entertaining was expensive.

Meanwhile Tom Wainwright drove Dolf hard. She typed innumerable letters; she made abstracts of minutes; she watched over his appointments; she smoothed angry visitors and delivered them over to him, lamb for the slaughter. She worked early and late to make herself an integral part of his life.

Moreover, she was a safety-valve. In her presence he could relax, and to his shameless, phlegmatic self.

"Do I have bond on my dress trousers, or not?" he would ask helplessly. "Where did you tell me to get shirts made—the place that told you knew went to? I don't see why I shouldn't wear diamond studs. It isn't vulgar for me because I can afford it."

"Yes, but it isn't done," she explained patiently. "Sir Julius and Sheila wouldn't understand. That sort of person thinks a lot of these small things."

"Miss Garth to you, please. By the way, Miss Garth is the young lady I hope to marry. Be particularly careful never to do anything to offend her. I couldn't overlook that."

Dolf nodded wisely.

"Right! Well, you'll be a good catch for her in some ways. They're as good as church mice, aren't they?"

"They were till I put Sir Julius into Ethiopian Oil shares. He made about a thousand out of them. Why are you smiling?"

"Oh, at nothing."

BUT she was thinking. "What a fool to cut your own throat!" and "That shortens the odds against me!" For she had made up her mind to marry him should the rose, steeled herself, wept bitter tears, and come out of the struggle unscathed as Fate.

"Even said we were grains of dust. What does it matter? His sort never marry my sort, or, if they do, it works them—and us. They live with us when we're young and pretty, make our own men impossible by contrast, and then go their way. I've got to marry or go under, and it's no fault for Tom as for me."

dared pronounce, not suspecting that at the same moment Madame d'Arrens was standing at the window, watching his dark figure disappear, her mind fixed on the days when they were both young and she had lived absorbed in the hope of bearing the three words that would have changed her destiny.

THEN came another dawn, shortly before the winter, comparing her faded face, her fragile shoulders, her wasted arms and hands with the pastel portrait near the bed that showed her when she was twenty; and she would sigh as she thought how happy she would have been if they had been able to live together, to pass along life's long road hand in hand. They had once loved each other, she was certain; she was sure they loved each other now. What had come between those loves of youth and age? . . . Why, when all the future stretched before them, had he not asked her to be his wife?

Why had he set out on that first long voyage without telling her he loved her? And when he came back, why had she not dominated her pride and timidity and done something to help him to speak?

HER explanation of his silence had never varied. She believed he had been attracted by some other woman, and this

ONE afternoon when he was away, Sheila Garth called at the Amalgamated Stores Office. She went up to Dolf's room and sat conspicuously on a table swinging her long, luscious, silk-stockinged legs.

"You know Mr. Wainwright as a child, didn't you?" she began carelessly. "You both lived in some dreadful village and your fathers kept little shops there. Isn't that right?"



PAINTING a picture of a palmer means nothing in the life of ARMAND BOTH. Battle, murder and sudden deaths—all glide gracefully from his facile brush—not, of course, to mention beautiful girls! Some artists are merely popular, some are really able; Armand is both! That is why he was chosen to illustrate Rex Beach's great new novel "Fleeing Gold." (See page 6 of this number.)

Dolf peeped her chin on her hands and stared unthinkingly at the visitor.

"I wonder what you want," she said slowly. "Whatever it is, you won't get it from me, Miss Garth. You'd better ask Mr. Wainwright himself. I'm his secretary, and my work doesn't include discussing his private life."

Sheila Garth laughed. "Aren't you rather a fool? You know you ought to marry him yourself, because you can supply just what he lacks. You know he wants to marry me, and yet you play into my hands. As a matter of fact I've had private inquiries made and I know as much as you could tell me. You see, Father's quite well-off now, and I'm not obliged to marry Mr. Wainwright. So, in his

quite frank, I shan't. I shall refuse him at the dance he's giving next week. You'd better catch him on the rebound. Well, I don't know why I trouble to tell you all this. Cheerio!"

She slid from the table and strolled away.

DOLF remembered Sheila when, in the morning, Wainwright invited her to the dance in question. "You'll be able to keep an eye on things and handle the people for me," he explained. "Don't go just to enjoy yourself. Keep Sir Julius in a good temper if possible; he fancies you. I believe."

She remembered again on the night of the dance when she met him in a corridor, white and collapsed his self-conscious exasperated, his mind stunned.

She put a hand on his arm and looked at him pityingly. After all, it seemed hard luck. He was well-meaning; he had no vice in him; and to Sheila he had been child's play.

"Well," she said, "what is it?" She stood before him, her blue eyes wide and starry, her white shoulders and throat emerging flowerlike from a sleeveless dance-gown; there was almost tenderness in the curve of the soft provocative mouth, and so, in sheer misery, he put his trust in her. She was someone he could depend upon, and, after all, she knew the worst about him. He need never worry to deceive her.

"SHEILA GARTH turned me down. I wanted her bad, Dolf. Dare say it served me right, for I can't say I loved her dearly, but I'd set my heart on her, and I made her old soul of a father. Now she laughs at me on the strength of the money I put in his way. It's a bitter blow; I despise a man that falls."

"Never mind, Tom," she said gently. "I don't think you two would have got on. She hadn't much respect for you, or anyone else. You want someone more sympathetic."

She was very close and very beautiful. He watched the slow rise and fall of her breast, almost fascinated. She did not appear to notice. "Like you," he said harshly, at last. "You've suffered and you understand. I don't know what sort of life you've led in London, and I don't care. You're a girl from my own village and I knew you as a little thing when you were frightened of your father. You've got grit in you for the way you came up here and fought your own battles. Dolf, will you marry me?"

"SO THIS," she thought, "is the moment of my life, and he doesn't care if I'm moral or immoral!" But aloud she replied: "Do you think you're sure of me, Tom? I haven't led any sort of life that entitles to say man who wants to marry me. But do you want to, honestly? Aren't you perhaps upset and not yourself?"

"No," he said doggedly. "I was mad and now I'm sane. I'll not have to pretend with you. You can tell me things I'll need to know; you're pretty enough for a king of his throne; and I've enough money to do you justice. And we respect one another and that's nine-tenths of marriage. I love you quite a lot and I don't suppose you actually hate me. Are you willing, Dolf?"

She bowed her head.

"If you're quite sure, Tom. And if you've prepared to settle as I suppose you do as that I mean) ask you for every penny I couldn't do that."

FOR a moment he eyed her almost with dislike. Then a smile broke over his face. She had appealed to his business instinct. He took her face between his palms and kissed her lingeringly. She did not shrink from the kiss. A wave of reaction broke over her, almost turning her sick.

The reality of the situation dawned upon her. Henceforward nothing mattered. She need take no thought for the morrow, since he had provided for an eternity of tomorrows. She need never again struggle for a livelihood; she was free from the pursuit of men, because his protection compassed her about like a wall of triple brass. The old excitement of her had faded forever, because there would be no longer anything to get excited about. There would never be any more of the charming, attractive, impermanent things of a world other than hers.

ON THE other hand she would be just as much chained to Tom Wainwright in the days of her beauty. She would be to the great ladies-in-waiting of the Man Women, and help to improve conversation. In her heart of hearts Dolf knew that this was worth all the rest put together, realized her woman's passion for an unlinked heart that nothing can sever.

WHEN she went to bed that night she wept a little, comparing Tom Wainwright's appearance and personality with the men she had known from the others. But in the morning she woke to a peace. She felt older, wiser, calmer, very permanent. She realized that this is what a girl may love are numbness; that there may be days of accomplishment, which she can look back serenely from the light, happy not to have frittered them.

BECAUSE a handsome young Grand Duke—a very Russian one—is executed, a English girl who had never him seen was sent. Watch for "Telepathy," by Dora B.

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shadow of love had for a time clouded their true affection. Later on he dared not approach her, for her manner showed that she could not forget his infidelity, and they had tacitly resigned themselves to separate and solitary lives. She used to think it all over as she lay in bed; she would think of it, too, as she furtively watched her old friend stuffing the cards, peaking the fire, or reading, in a voice that was still beautiful, the Paris papers or some book they both liked.

THEN came one evening when, because it was raining, because the first days of autumn gave her some of their languor, because the logs on the fire sang as they burned, or just because for some unknown reason her thoughts kept turning persistently to the past, Madame d'Arrens did not feel inclined to play the usual rubber. She had paid no attention while he told her the news of the day, and when she had twice made a mistake at cards, Monsieur de Lambret commented on her unusual absence of mind. She explained that she felt cold, and that the lamp was not burning well. He proposed stopping the game and drawing their chairs nearer the fire. When they had been sitting for some

time in silence and ten o'clock struck, he rose to go.

"Not yet," she said. "As cards don't amuse the tonight, let us do something else. What about a book? Won't you read to me?"

"What?"

"No matter, some old forgotten book, a discarded friend. I keep all those I loved when I was young on the top shelf of the bookcase. Put up your hand and take the first you touch."

HIS fingers touched one that had a discolored binding, and smothered old paper and dried flowers. He read the title out loud:

"Little Darrin"—Dickens."

"What a coincidence!" smiled Madame d'Arrens. "I remember that I once lent you that book."

He bowed his head, but as he put out his hand to turn the cover, the volume opened of itself when an envelope had been placed between the pages, an envelope discolored with age on which was written: "Marie I see."

He set looking at it in silence.

"Well, what's the matter? What is it?" said Madame d'Arrens.

He hid out the envelope. She took it, read the name, and turned over in her fingers.

"What can it be? It must have been there a very long time."

HIS SAT silent, the book on his knee, while she opened the envelope, amused at the idea of finding some relic of the past. But as she smiled trembled and faded as she bent forward to hold the paper to the light, and her voice seemed as far away as the words she read:

"November, 1865. My ship leaves tomorrow, but before going I want to tell you that I love you. . . . Julie de Lambret."

It was her own to be silent.

"You never found it, then?" he asked.

"Never," she murmured.

There were tears in his eyes as he took back his letter, and tears were running down her cheeks as she bent over him repeating:

"If only I had known! . . . If only I had known! . . ."

BOTH were dependent upon her for life but I'm neither of them could do the one thing necessary to save her—and then? Maurice Leclerc's "Night and Silence"—see